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## Psychological and Educational Support of Substituting Family Selection for Orphaned Children of Pre-School Age

Tatiana A. Kostyukova<sup>a\*</sup>, Valentina I. Revyakina<sup>b</sup>, Vyacheslav K. Erokhin<sup>c</sup>,  
Olga T. Loyko<sup>c</sup>, Natalya P. Galtsova<sup>d</sup>, Svetlana V. Dryga<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Tomsk State University, 634050 Lenina str., 36, Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

<sup>b</sup>*Tomsk State Pedagogical University, Kievskaya str., 60, Tomsk, Russia*

<sup>c</sup>*Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenina str., 30, Tomsk, Russia*

<sup>d</sup>*Tomsk Agricultural Institute, K. Marks str., 19, Tomsk, Russia*

### Abstract

The article presents study results towards a problem of psychological and educational support of substituting family selection for orphaned children of pre-school age. This problem is the issue of the day in modern Russia. We conducted a survey with a primary objective to study social and psychological particularities of substituting families and their educational deficits in development and upbringing of a pre-school age child. The obtained results showed generalized social and psychological difficulties of parents which require special psychological and educational support and selection criteria of parents who are going to adopt pre-school age children without parental care.

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### 1. Introduction

According to the Federal state statistics service, today there are about 700,000 officially recognized orphaned children without parental care in Russia. It is about 2.5 % of the children population at the age 1-18 years. According to the Agency of social information this figure is 0.5 % in Great Britain, 0.6 % in the USA and 0.89 % in Germany. Every year more than 130,000 children are deprived of parental care in Russia, 545,000 children deprived of parental care live in substituting families [1]. 260,000 children are brought up in state institutions; more than 20,000 live in orphanage houses. The number of children without parental care at an early age is still

\* Kostyukova T.A. Tel.: +73822529720; fax: +73822529710  
E-mail address: [kostyukova@inbox.ru](mailto:kostyukova@inbox.ru)

on the increase. Every year its number is about 1–1.3% of the newborn children. A part of all the children ( $\frac{3}{4}$ ) are children of the first year who are sent to orphanage houses. Nowadays one of the primary goals of the national population and family policy is to decrease the number of orphaned children and children without parental care. Orphanage houses are a traditional and more widespread upbringing model for orphaned children. But many foreign and Russian scholars proved that this model is inadequate for child developmental needs. According to Laugmeier J., Prikhozhan A.M., Spivakovskaya A.S., Eydemiller E.G., children brought up in orphanage houses are retarded in their intellectual, emotional and social development. They do not have the experience of family life and family support. They have enormous difficulties in further adaptation to the social environment. That's why the ultimate aim of all state institutions for orphaned children and children without parental care is children placement in substituting families.

However, there is an alternative model of orphaned children placement. Substituting families (adoption, child custody, foster families, family and upbringing group) are encountering extreme difficulties in modern Russia because a large part of the population has a passive attitude to children from socially disadvantaged families.

According to Oslon V.N., Spivakovskaya A.S., Kholmogorova A.B., the upbringing of adopted preschool children poses some challenges in their social, psychological and physical development. The success depends on the type of a foster family. The family may represent “a community of happiness”, which is characterized by “mutual satisfaction of psychological needs, stability and depth of emotional bonds, intersection of private life” or a family will have destructive relationships with children being sent back to their institutions of social custody. So, it is necessary to raise a problem of enhancing aid effectiveness in families with orphaned children.

Our hypothesis is that development effectiveness of pre-school age children in a substituting family is related to special psychological and educational support of foster parent selection.

## 2. Method

The participants of our study were children up to 4 years old who live in a regional state health care institution called “The orphanage house for children with central lesion and mental disturbance” and located in Tomsk and substituting families living on the territory of Tomsk and the Tomsk region with different forms of family placement for orphaned children (adoption, custody, foster family).

The following methods were used observation, survey, questionnaires, interview and some others; diagnostic methods: PARI (Parental attitude research instrument) – family life through parents' eyes (Sheffer E.S., Bell R.K., adaptation Nescherit T.V.), test-questionnaire of parental attitude (Varga A.D., Stolin V.V.); life orientation test (Leontiev D.A.), methodology of ultimate meanings (Leontiev D.A.), methodology of empathy study (Yusupov I.M., Nikireev E.M.), colour test of relationships (Etkind A.M., interpretation Sobchik L.N.), free drawing “My family” (Khomentauskas G.T.); methods of mathematical statistics.

## 3. Result

The procedure for effective support of family placement for orphaned children and children without parental care is based on the selection of substituting family candidates, oriented to the scientifically-substantiated specific features of foster parents, the detection and formation of positive motivation to create a substituting family.

Experimental work was based on 112 substituting families. According to this work, social and psychological peculiarities were identified for upbringing of orphaned children by foster parents:

- Active civic stance, positive self-esteem, a high level of self-control;
- System of life values and desire to have children;
- Responsibility and tolerance in relationships;
- Orientation to family interests;
- Emotional connection with adopted children;

- Skills to create role –play and psychological space for adopted children in a family system.

Experimental survey of these particularities became the aim of our study. The level of the particularities is one of the conditions for implementing the individual support model for orphaned children placement.

The procedure of diagnostic study of substituting parents was implemented in the main institutions and foster families in the form of group and individual communication.

112 foster parents from 87 substituting families were studied during the experiment. The families brought up children at the age of 4 years from a regional orphanage house. The families lived in Tomsk and the Tomsk region.

The psycho-diagnostic results obtained, interpretation of drawing tests, communication, observation, study of the families' living conditions helped us to draw up social and psychological portraits of 112 foster parents [2]. Let's look at some of the examples.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Family One

Tatyana M., 32, has higher education. She is married with children of her own. She lives and works in Tomsk. The type of placement is adoption.

According to the methodology of life meaning orientations **Family One** has high figures almost in all the parameters. The exception is the average figures on the scale "Life effectiveness or self-realization satisfaction". The result of the first scale methodology (40 points is the highest figure in the families under investigation) underlines the fact Tatyana has a meaningful life and has a perspective. A high point in "Locus of control – I" shows that the foster parent is a strong, self-sufficient person, capable of building her life in accordance with the aims and ideas of life meaning. On the whole, the high overall figure of life meaningfulness is proved by all of the above results.

Her adopted child is associated with yellow which corresponds to sunshine, cheerfulness and happiness. Yellow symbolizes new and forward-looking ideas and also implies ambitions.

In the drawing the family is depicted together - "mother, father and child". They join their hands. Other members of the family are separated but are not very far away, but it is meaningful. Parents of the adopted child take a higher position than his own family. This fact shows that foster parents are directly involved in family life. On the whole, the drawing is brown which means internal and physical discomfort. This fact was proven by the talks and observation. The family consists of five members and lives in a small two-roomed apartment. They are thinking of a more spacious living area.

The methodology of ultimate meanings showed the richness of the foster parent's inner world. Her semantic units are long and expanded. The system of her needs has such values as goals, self-development, self-improvement, needs satisfaction, art of living instead of surviving.

The foster parents are satisfied with the situation, the child has already adapted, and his development has positive dynamics. There is a close emotional connection between the foster parents and their child. He is respected as a person, judging by the well-drawn details.

### 4.2. Family Two

Valentina Z., 52. She has secondary professional education. She is married with two children. She lives in the Tomsk region and does not work. The type of placement is custody.

According to the test results of life meaning orientations, Valentina Z. has a high overall index of life meaningfulness. She also has got high rates on the scales "Goals", "Process" and "Locus of control – I". The results of the first scale methodology underline the fact that Valentina has lived a meaningful and effective life as

she has got two daughters and two grandsons. As the children have grown up and they do not live together with their parents, Valentina is faced up with the “empty nest” situation. That was her reason to start a foster family in order to compensate for the unity of her family. The high rate of “Locus of control – I” shows that Valentina is a strong, self-sufficient person, capable of building her life in accordance with her aims and ideas. The average rate in “Locus of control – life” proves that a person can influence the course of her life.

According to the color test, the foster parent is associated with the green color which characterizes the person as being stable and settled. Valentina Z. wants her own views on life to be dominant because she is a bearer of main life principles. She has got a tendency to moralize and teach other people. This feature may be explained by the fact that she worked as a kindergarten nurse.

The child's position is two steps lower than that of the foster parent. It points to the problems in the family and emotional difficulties in the relationships with the child. During the talk the foster parent spoke about the child's health and development problems. He was retarded and aggressive. He needed a lot of attention. The child's drawing consists of six colors. It underlined low emotional relationship between the family members, a lack of interpersonal relationships and any activities, passivism and the lack of experience in social relationships (all the family members have frowning faces, they keep their hands behind their back, they have no legs, all the people are drawn at the bottom of the page). The tensed emotional atmosphere in the family is expressed by hachure lines, erasing, corrections, hyper weight for pictures of all family members.

Valentina Z. would like to continue to bring up child C. and “make him a man” despite all the difficulties. A foster parent needs psychological help and a child needs intervention help. We also paid attention that a foster parent did not pay attention to health condition of a child, his development level because she already had two adopted teenagers. However, it is vivid that family relationships are not stable, emotionally tensed with low interpersonal contacts. Besides, Valentina Z. associates her adopted 15-year-old girl with grey and she takes the seventh position. This fact speaks about a conflict. So, we may conclude that the foster child C. is not guaranteed against taking the same place in the family as the foster daughter T. or even worse - being sent back to state institutions.

#### *4.3. Family Three*

Svetlana P., 28. She has secondary professional education. She is married with no children of her own. She works and lives in the Tomsk region. The type of placement is custody.

According to the methodology of life meaning orientations, Family Three has a high overall index of life meaningfulness. The foster parent has got high rates on the scale “Process” which means a good interest in life and emotional intensity. The full meaning of life provides future determination. The high point on the “Result” scale reflects the evaluation and meaningfulness of her life. The family has been living together for eight years but they do not have their own children. That was the reason why they had taken a child under custody.

According to the color test, the foster parent has inflated self-esteem because she puts herself in the first place. The foster child is associated with red. It means life energy, desires and all types of needs and ambitions. This color reflects physical activity and impulsive energy. During the talk we found out that the foster child was very impulsive, active, and emotional. As Svetlana P. has no experience in upbringing, she wants to turn to a psychologist for help.

For color associations the foster child uses six colors, it means that her relational worldview is slightly simplified. It is proven by the fact that all the family members are drawn schematically and discretely at different corners of the sheet. The first object she had depicted was a house with small windows but completely doorless. It means aloofness and lack of desire to communicate. Moreover, it is proved by a big fence around the house. A very big distance between the mother and the foster daughter underlines weak emotional bonds. The girl does not want to go home and she cries every time. We paid attention to their living conditions and noticed that it was very dirty in the house. There were not many furniture items, dahlia roots took half of the child's room, her bed was not made up and her mattress was dirty. Her drunk father was sleeping on the floor (not surprisingly, he took

the fifth place, according to the color associations, and he is separated from other the family members in the drawing).

Thus, Svetlana P. is dissatisfied with the situation; she has got problems with child adaptation and emotional relationship between her and her foster daughter. Svetlana P. confirmed that she needed psychological assistance.

So, the study analysis of the substituting parents (the results of communication, tests, observation) provided us with the common social and psychological features of substituting families:

- Difficulties in relationships with adopted children;
- Weak bonds between family members;
- Foster families do not give their preference in emotional bonds to adopted children (according to the color relationships test), but they take an active position to their foster child.

#### 4.4. Criteria of parent selection

The above survey methods and the social and psychological portrayals of substituting families helped us to point out common criteria for selecting parents who would like to bring up children without parental care. These criteria are a system of life values and motivation to have children; skills to establish a close emotional connection with adopted children; skills to create the role-play and psychological space for adopted children in the family system.

*According to the criterion to have children in a system of life values*, in most cases (71 %) foster parents have the needs to have children. In some cases (41 %) foster parents demonstrate a good contact, close interpersonal relationships, increased responsibility for children. The studied foster parents (29 %) also show the importance of such values as material prosperity, internal and physical comfort and social status. They have no interest to have children.

*According to the criterion of having emotional connection with adopted children* the substituting parents (32 %) have interpersonal distance problems with their children. In every third family there is a distance between a foster parent and a child. The foster families do not pay much attention to their adopted children. So, this fact leads us to doubt whether such a foster parent may become a good teacher for the child in question. In most families a child's position is lower than that of its foster parents (according to the color test). This situation underlines a lack of close relationships with their child and difficulties in establishing stable emotional connection.

*According to the criterion of creating the role-play and psychological space for adopted children*, most of the families (63 %) demonstrate parental authority and in some cases (22 %) the children's will is damaged. Moreover, we also noticed extra concentration on children and conflict situations (11 %) in foster families (due to the results of PARI (Parental attitude research instrument) methodology – family life through parents' eyes). The foster families supported the idea of receiving medical, psychological, pedagogical assistance with their adopted children (85 %) at every stage, the need for establishing educational support centers for family placement.

Thus, the study of psychological and educational support for substituting family selection for orphaned preschool children without parental care showed that its implementation contributes to foster parents' selection aimed at compensating deprivation violations, integrating them into social life, and promoting further socialization and adaptation of adopted children and foster families.

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